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Week of
December 1, 1941

Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play during the week of December 1, 1941.*
†"Hope for a Harvest" opened Wednesday, November 26th, at the Guild Theatre.

THEATRE REVIEWS IS A COMPLETE GUIDE AND RECORD TO THE NEW YORK SHOWS

Critics' Theatre Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York papers

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL AND AMERICAN

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"Hope for a Harvest"

Reprinted from NEW YORK POST, *November 27, 1941*

"Hope for a Harvest" New Comedy at the Guild Theatre

By WILELLA WALDORF

SOPHIE TREADWELL apparently feels that a Back-to-the-Soil Movement wouldn't be a bad thing for America just now, and she has written a quiet, heart-warming play about it entitled, "Hope for a Harvest," introduced at the Guild Theatre last night, with Fredric March and his wife, Florence Eldridge, in the principal roles.

Although Miss Treadwell's drama—she calls it a comedy—is hardly a profound work, following a conventional and generally obvious plot pattern, it is easy to see what moved the Guild, and the Marches, to bring it to Broadway. Miss Treadwell has something to say that is worth saying, and she says it simply but with a good deal of conviction. Without indulging in elaborately poetic transports on the subject of the Good Earth, she nevertheless conveys a love for the land, and a deep interest in what has happened in America these past few years to take people away from it.

California Fruit Land

"Hope for a Harvest" is laid in a fruitful section of the rich San Joaquin Valley in California, where Elliott Martin, once an ardent peach grower, has lost most of his land to the Dagoes and the Japs, and now ekes out a living running a filling station on what remains of it. The country swarms with tourists and Okies traveling from here to there and back again, and very few people in the vicinity, except the Dagoes and the Japs, are inclined to lower themselves to the extent of working at the business of farming, or at much of anything else, for that matter.

"Everybody wants something for nothing" is the way Aunt Mat puts it. Expensive electric ice boxes and motor cars, all purchased on the installment plan by those who never ccase to protest that they are hard up. No market for the fruit on the trees, so it isn't even picked. "Too much of everything—that's why we're all starving."

Into this "country slum" Miss Treadwell brings Carlotta Thatcher, Elliott Martin's cousin, who had gone to Europe as a girl, married there, lived through two wars, and comes back, a widow, to take up life where she left it at the old Thatcher ranch house, willed to her by her grandmother. Fresh from a land that is hardly overflowing with milk and honey, she is appalled at what has happened to the once fertile fields of her childhood, now little more than a dreary dump interspersed with gas stations, dance halls and hot dog stands.

A Pleasant Play

How she determines to farm the old Thatcher place and make at least a living out of it, how she rouses cousin Elliott from his lethargy and even brings about an understanding between him and his arch enemy, Joe de Lucchi, the "Dago," who has become a success through sheer hard work and good horse sense where Elliott failed, is Miss Treadwell's play. There is nothing spectacular about it, and some people will probably find it tiresome at times, with its sub-plot involving the inevitable confused young daughter who is going to have a baby, etc., but we found it, all in all, a pleasant if hardly exciting experience in the theatre.

Farming, Carlotta finds, is not just a means of making money. It is a way of life, if you don't mind working at it instead of loafing around complaining about the lack of markets and the influx of foreign labor.

Lester Vail has staged "Hope for a Harvest" undcrstandingly in a couple of sets by Watson Barratt, full of warm California sunshine, and there is a good cast to play it. Mr. March gives one of his most convincing performances as the bitter, despairing, ill-tempered Elliott who has lost his ambition and his nerve. Miss Eldridge has warm feeling and an ability to make her points without overdoing them that is in key with the quiet tone of the play. As the irrepressible Joe de Lucchi, Alan Reed is delightfully in character, with other good performances by Helen Carew, Shelley Hull, Judy Parrish and Arthur Franz, and brief but amusing contributions by Doro Merande, John Morny and Edith King.

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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

"Hope for a Harvest"

Reprinted from NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN, *November 27, 1941*

'Hope for a Harvest' Presented by Guild

Fredric March and Florence Eldridge in Play by Sophie Treadwell

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH Sophie Treadwell is an earnest playwright, anxious to discuss an important subject earnestly her new play "Hope for a Harvest" turned out at the Guild Theatre last night to be a tedious symposium, littered with words and almost empty of drama.

Fredric March and Florence Eldridge lend it the sort of worthy performances that indicate their faith if not their fire and I failed to find the glow of either life or interest from one end of it to the other.

This is especially unfortunate because Miss Treadwell has tackled an excellent theme. Since she takes her time at writing she has not been panicked into convenient topics in the news. She has gone deeper than the easy immediate subjects and has tried to discover what America should do to save not the world, but itself.

What, she would like to know, is the matter with this country? How did it get this way? How is it that people haven't enough to eat in a nation that has so much food that it pays its farmers for what they don't grow? How is it that folks who haven't enough to live on pawn their furtures to buy streamlined kitchens and new automobiles?

Why is it that some men would rather loaf than get less than $8 a day and why have we developed false social standards and racial intolerance, and how is it finally that, with bingo, prize contests, and so on, we have made a national cult of getting something for nothing?

These are depressing questions and Miss Treadwell probably would not be asking them if she had not already thought up some optimistic answers.

Ranch Goes to Ruin

The questions are faced in the play by Carlotta Thatcher, an American woman who, after spending twenty years or so in Europe, returns from fallen France to the California ranch of her youth to find that it has gone to ruin, that her cousin, Elliott Martin, instead of managing the family property, has let it slide to run a gas station, because it's easier, and cultivated nothing more useful than an ancient grudge against his Italian neighbor.

All the Americans thereabouts warn Carlotta that it is hopeless for her to try to live on the land, but the old Italian tells her the secret she wants to know. You do not work the land, he says, to make a living, but to make a life.

This pretty discovery, and the admonition that Americans ought to quit talking about freedom and leisure until they learn what to do with both of them, is the lesson of the play, which breaks out into a happy ending that is possibly truer to the theatre than to life.

All this sounds just as dull on the stage as it does right here in type—only a good deal longer and less skippable. Not only are the characters themselves uninteresting but their talk is drearily placid, and the plot so mechanically obvious that you don't quite believe it even when it seems to make hard, common sense.

March as Ex-Farmer

As the sullen ex-farmer Mr. March though forceful and forthright is so seriously hampered by the lack of variety in the characterization and in the scenes that the performance is a vigorous monotone, unrelieved until Miss Treadwell brings out the rainbows at the end.

Miss Eldridge is equally good, and equally handicapped by a colorless character that is flatly two dimensional and at times, seemingly not quite bright. Doro Merande provides a brief and amusing sketch of a lazy housworker who thinks the hired help ought to be helped, Judy Parrish and Arthur Franz are both excellent as a pair of distracted young lovers in the midst of a Romeo and Juliet famly feud, and Shelley Hull, son of Henry, makes his fleeting first appearance on the stage.

While they all help to discuss our farming problems earnestly they do nothing, I fear, to solve the strictly urban problem of playgoing.

'HOPE FOR A HARVEST'

A play in three acts by Sophie Treadwell; staged by Lester Vail; settings by Watson Barratt; presented by the Theatre Guild at the Guild Theatre on November 26, 1941. The cast:

Mrs. Matilda Martin	Helen Carew
Antoinette Martin	Judy Parrish
Elliott Martin	Frederic March
Carlotta Thatcher	Florence Eldridge
Nelson Powell	John Morny
Victor de Lucchi	Arthur Franz
Billy Barnes	Shelley Hull
Bertha Barnes	Edith King
Joe de Lucchi	Alan Reed
A Woman	Doro Merande

Reprinted from NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE, *November 27, 1941*

California

By RICHARD WATTS, JR.

IN "HOPE FOR A HARVEST," Miss Sophie Treadwell is contemplating with deep earnestness the more spiritual side of the problems of agriculture in the Far West. While not ignoring the economic aspects of modern American farming, she is chiefly concerned with the effects of the decadence of rural culture on the souls, the minds and the characters of those who, in the author's opinion, are destroying the civilization they inherited from their pioneer ancestors. Although she reaches certain optimistic conclusions, Miss Treadwell's viewpoint is essentally a pessimistic one, and her report is set down in a thoughtful and rather lugubrious play which has the misfortune to be more didactic than dramatic. It is attractively acted, particularly by Fredric March in one of the two leading roles, but its final effect is of the mildest sort of theatrical interest.

• • •

It is the melancholy belief of Miss Treadwell that the present generation in Western agriculture suffers chiefly from a paltry sort of self-pity. Because economic conditions are difficult, the farmers of California, she tells us, stand around talking about the hopelessness of it all and denouncing their more successful foreign neighbors, when they are not gadding about in their automobiles or going to the movies to win sets of dishes. Meanwhile, the near-by Italians and Japanese, who do not waste time on feeling sorry for themselves but set out by dint of hard work and fine determination to be successful, have taken over what were once the pioneer virtues and have made them their own. To demonstrate her thesis, the playwright tells us about a noble Western woman, who returns to her home in California from disillusioned Europe, filled with a high belief that American pioneering stock can still be saved.

• • •

Because "Hope for a Harvest" has something of importance to say, and says it with unmistakable sincerity, one has from the start a sympathetic concern with it and a far deeper respect for its heart and mind than for more expert dramas of a lesser integrity. It really is striving to speak to the soul of America with gravity and idealistic fervor. The unfortunate thing is that, in expressing its author's heartfelt interest in the future of the nation in a time of desperate crisis, the play goes in for some unpersuasive and undramatic theatrical matters which destroy the greater part of its effectiveness. The story of the rejuvenation of Elliott Martin, the weary and defeated farmer, under the influence of a good woman is seldom impressive, and the tale of Martin's daughter and the noble Italian boy who is willing to marry her despite her rather serious troubles with sex is not helpful to the evening. As for the sudden happy ending I don't think Miss Treadwell believes in it, either.

• • •

As the embittered farmer who blames his troubles on every one but himself, Mr. March gives a splendid performance, which proves once more what a good, straightforward actor he really is. As the idealistic lady who believes that the qualities of the pioneers are still alive, Miss Florence Eldridge has a part which forces her at times to be too saccharine for comfort, but despite that handicap she plays with admirable directness, simplicity and feeling. As the sympathetic Italian who really does carry on the tradition of the American pioneer, Alan Reed is excellent in a role that is sure-fire for so good a player. Miss Judy Parrish is of great help as the innocent but careless daughter, and Arthur Franz, as the noble Italian boy who loves her, proves himself one of the capable juveniles of the stage. Then, too, there is Miss Doro Merande, the unforgettable Okie mother in "Love's Old Sweet Song," who is again a delight as another shiftless matron. "Hope for a Harvest" has the virtue of a high sincerity.

"Hope for a Harvest"

Reprinted from NEW YORK DAILY NEWS, *November 27, 1941*

Early American Virtues the Plea of 'Hope for a Harvest'

"Hope for a Harvest," drama by Sophie Treadwell. Produced by the Theatre Guild, Inc., at the Guild Theatre, New York, Nov. 26, 1941.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

PERHAPS it was the Fredric Marches who discovered Sophie Treadwell's "Hope for a Harvest" and sent it to the Theatre Guild. It is like them — wholesome, human, honest and socially conscious.

So much so that it seemed a little unhappily housed in the Guild Theatre last night. What did this Broadway audience know or care about the disintegration of pioneer stock on the Pacific coast?

What did it know or care about the possible reclamation of those sturdier characteristics that developed the land that has come to represent little more in the east than the site of Hollywood and the home of bungalow high jinks?

It followed Miss Treadwell's development of Carlotta Thatcher's experience, the time Carlotta returned from Paris and found her old home and the home of her grandmother as completely abandoned as a revolutionary farm in Connecticut, with listless interest.

Fortunately Carlotta's story and discoveries took on character values before the play was finished, and this brought the play a rewarding endorsement at the close. There was never any doubt of the honest welcome intended for Mr. March and Miss Eldridge.

Crusading Spirit

Well, truth to tell, Miss Treadwell, as earnest in her mission with "Hope for a Harvest" as Edna Ferber is in hers with "The Land Is Bright," does do a bit of dallying through her first scenes.

There is a good deal of discussion and precious little action while she is setting the scene and revealing the wabbly character of her second and third generation Californians.

They have become a poor lot, in Miss Treadwell's view. The Japs and the Italians have taken over the land and made it pay by hard work and low standards of living.

And the descendants of those rugged Americans who discovered the land have acquired the habit of lazily accepting their own defeat. Little by little they have given up trying to farm in competition with the foreign groups that have moved in. Little by little they have lost all pride of race and country.

Carlotta Wins

Give them an acre or two and a gas station, or a little strip along the highway for a hot dog stand, and they are content. Let the Oakies pick the fruit. Let the newcomers do the farm work.

Carlotta is out to change this. She moves back into Grandma Thatcher's old house and sets about doing a bit of farming on her own. Let her cousin Elliott go the way of the beaten and the damned. She will make a new stand for the simpler and sturdier American virtues.

Carlotta's success is in the pleasant story tradition. She makes herself beloved of the wondering natives, stirs her sluggish cousin to action, helps solve the problem of a simple child in love, and also in trouble, and finally feels again the earth under her feet and knows the feeling to be good.

Mr. March, with the fine sense of character that has brought him many successes in the theatre and on the screen, manages to make something more than a playwright's prig of cousin Elliott.

Miss Eldridge's heart, as well as her talent, has gone into the playing of Carlotta. This is the sort of thing she would like to talk about to the people she feels should listen. She is as natural a crusader as Miss Treadwell herself.

Alan Reed, playing a smart Italian fruit rancher with proper restraint but characteristic gusto, is a help to the story. So are Judy Parrish and Arthur Frans as the juveniles, and Helen Carew as a maiden aunt.

Henry Hull's son, Shelley, has a bit and Doro Merande a scene. Lester Vail did the directing and Watson Barratt the sets.

Reprinted from NEW YORK TIMES, *November 27, 1941*

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Hope for a Harvest"

By BROOKS ATKINSON

SOPHIE TREADWELL has an idea that Americans should work. This unusual notion is the theme of her newest play, "Hope for a Harvest," which Mr. and Mrs. Fredric March helped to act at the Guild Theatre last evening. Instead of praising democracy, Miss Treadwell suggests that Americans ought to work at it the hard way, and that the sickness of the body politic is not the system but the lethargy of the people.

Although Miss Treadwell's daring theme is not likely to solve everything with one pen-stroke, it deserves a better exposition than she has given it. The author of "Machinal" and "Plumes in the Dust," has not beaten the materials of "Hope for a Harvest" into shape. What she has written is a loose and languid play, distinguished chiefly by the fact that it gives Mr. March an opportunity to act with uncommon range and vigor.

• • •

When Carlotta Thatcher returns from Europe to some native farm lands in California, she looks forward to a life of richness and sound spirit. But she finds that the American farmers of her generation have degenerated into whiners, full of pseudo-economic alibis. "There's too much of everything," one beaten farmer explains. "That's why we are all starving to death." Meanwhile, immigrant farmers from Italy and Japan succeed in raising crops and making money, although the Americans look down on them. One Italian farmer in the neighborhood shares Mrs. Thatcher's sentimental enthusiasm for the land and encourages her to get started. At the final curtain the supposition is that she has stirred some of the old American life in that community.

• • •

Although it would be pleasant to believe that the economics of farming could be solved as easily as that, "Hope for a Harvest" does not present much evidence of Mrs. Thatcher's genius for the soil. She is a friendly person with wholesome ideas, but she seems to have very little training for one of the most learned of the professions. And Miss Treadwell's play has several other problems to solve, such as race prejudice and the love life of a girl who has been betrayed. The girl solves her problem by fainting dead away in the presence of the boy she loves, although, by some oversight he is not responsible for her interesting condition. Miss Treadwell's theme and her people seem to give her a lot of trouble.

• • •

As a disillusioned farmer of middle years, Mr. March gives an excellent performance. He has a natural talent for character parts, but he also has the imagination, the strength and the skill to illuminate ideas and to pull a play together. This is the best acting he has contributed to the Broadway stage. As Carlotta Thatcher, Florence Eldridge, who answers to the name of March offstage, gives a pleasant and shining performance. Alan Reed brings a lot of rolling gusto to his scenes in the part of the Italian farmer next door. The young people in the story are attractively played by Judy Parrish, Arthur Frans and Shelley Hull, who is one of Henry Hull's boys. Doro Merande acts a shiftless widow with her highly individualized native humor.

In designing the kitchen of a service station and the living-room of an old ranch house, Watson Barratt has had the courage to stick to the facts. Miss Treadwell has put a number of common-sense facts inside the settings, harvesting more of hope than drama in the process.

"Hope for a Harvest"

Reprinted from NEW YORK SUN, *November 27, 1941*

'Hope for a Harvest,' by Sophie Treadwell, Opens at the Guild Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

MISS SOPHIE TREADWELL makes a sound point and makes it several times over in "Hope for a Harvest," which opened last evening at the Guild Theater. She argues her point through the mouths of convincingly drawn characters, and illustrates it graphically in glimpses of their lives. When she has finished you agree with her completely, and are almost as completely unexcited.

It is Miss Treadwell's conviction that the present generation of old-stock Americans has lost itself among its gadgets. Those who live in the country have come to look upon farming as a business, not as a way of life. In California, which is the scene of Miss Treadwell's play, sturdy immigrants have taken over, living closer to nature and strongly. The old stock has gone to seed. It is sometimes too proud, sometimes too lazy, too untrained to work. It is not enough, Miss Treadwell points out, to be free. Freedom carries with it a duty to be responsible.

Miss Treadwell illustrates by contrasting the present condition of one of the old families with that of its vigorous Italian successor. A woman in young middle life, and of the old Thatcher strain, comes back from France and finds the friends of her childhood gone to ruin. A cousin has given up peach growing and is grumblingly content with a pittance from a filling station, and with his assumed superiority to the immigrants. Another cousin is buying too many cars on the installment plan and frittering away her time at the movies. A pretty young girl of the family has got into trouble with a useless boy. "Okies," of ancient stock but suspended animation, happen by. When the returned traveler decides to farm the old ranch, everybody tries to discourage her. But the robust Italian shows her the way. His equally robust son marries the girl in trouble and more mature love also finds a way.

All these incidents, rather too patly, prove the author's point. The characters themselves are not to be quarreled with. They are believable, sharply observed, clearly described. The author's own arguments, if too often repeated, are advanced through literate, perceptive dialogue. Yet, although a good many things happen, one leaves the play feeling that no story has really been told. A point has been illustrated, aptly enough. But events and characters grow out of a theme, not a theme out of a story. When the elements of a play appear in that relationship you have didacticism rather than drama. In spite of amusing, and sometimes moving moments, didacticism is what you have in "Hope for a Harvest."

For characters more closely related to argument than to life, those of "Hope for a Harvest" are excellently played. Fredric March gets a kind of sullen strength into his playing of Elliott Martin, the filling station proprietor, and Florence Eldridge plays affectingly the role of wanderer come home. Helen Carew gives an astringent interpretation of an older member of the old family; Alan Reed is full of vitality in the role of the robust Italian. Judy Parrish is gay and charming in the lighter moments of the young girl's life and suffers prettily, if not very deeply, when things go wrong. Doro Merande, although her character illustrates another fact of the theme, makes it rich with comic idiosyncrasy. A little idiosyncrasy comes as a considerable relief after so much logic.

Reprinted from NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM, *November 27, 1941*

Hope for a Harvest Deals with Farmer's Deterioration

By JOHN MASON BROWN

IF HAVING something to say were the same thing as saying it well Sophie Treadwell's Hope for a Harvest might be a better play. Miss Treadwell's theme is valid enough, even if it may seem slightly remote to those of us in New York who have had our difficulties trying to find orchards to tend and fields to plow.

Miss Treadwell is condemning the deterioration of the American character. More specifically, in terms of a ranch in California, she is showing how the country is imperiled by a spoiled generation. Her farmers are people who expect to get something for nothing; who cheat the government to get on Relief; who have abandoned the soil they inherited; been corrupted by gadgets bought on the installment plan and who have reached a point where they not only refuse to work themselves but look down on those who do.

* * *

This is a big subject—true, timely and tragic. But, though Miss Treadwell writes about it with the earnestness of an editorial writer turning out his first editorial, she unfortunately brings to it none of that dramatic skill which once upon a time lent excitement to her Machinal.

Her *deus ex machina* is a saintly woman, an American who, after having spent many years in Paris until France fell, comes back home. By her sheer goodness she reawakens pride in the land (and something more) in her cousin who has gone to seed, makes peace with his hard-working Italian neighbors and starts the ranch going once again as her granny kept it going, proud of her work and happy in it.

Regrettably it is more than the peaches and the wheat, the grapes and the beans which sprout in Hope for a Harvest. The Five Little Peppers also grow again. In fact, all five of them find themselves rolled into one in the person of Miss Treadwell's heroine.

* * *

The play in which this noble reformer does her good works is a listless affair, as enervating as it is well meaning. Its first act is given over to shovelfuls of exposition. Thereafter Miss Treadwell begins reaching for a pointer which she handles none too well. She does, however, sketch in some local types to illustrate her argument. One of these, the Italian neighbor, is played with welcome energy by Alan Reed. And another, a woman seeking a job where the help is helped, is hilariously characterized by Doro Merande. But the writing to its repetitious end remains superficial and dull.

In the Theatre Guild's production at the Guild Fredric March, as the farmer cousin who is redeemed, and Florence Eldridge, as the homing dove who redeems him, are obviously good people, pleasant and high minded, who have earnestly set about doing a good job. The only trouble is that they do not succeed in making Miss Treadwell's play interesting.

Reprinted from
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
November 27, 1941

Hope Talks Itself Out of a Harvest

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

IF *Hope for a Harvest* were by an unknown playwright, if it were produced by some drama workshop or experimental theater, and if—most important of all—this were the year 1926, one would concede that it showed a certain promise. But coming from the author of *Machinal* under the auspices of the Theatre Guild in the year 1941, one can only brand it a deep disappointment, if not a downright failure; and even the fact that it brings Fredric March back to Broadway in a thoroughly capable performance cannot go very far toward making amends.

Hope for a Harvest reveals intelligence, a tolerant eye for humanity and a certain feeling for character, but these assets are not enough to take it any distance as a play. Miss Treadwell has committed too many and too serious blunders. She has refused to develop the one tolerably good theme at her disposal. She has drained her play of vitality by swamping it with talk. She has prolonged it with repetitious scenes and padded with trivial ones. She has been extremely clumsy in her stagecraft, even to the business of getting people on and off the scene; and she has even forfeited the play's claims to seriousness by jauntily wrapping it up with an old-fashioned all-'round happy ending.

The play tells how Carlotta Thatcher returns, after 20 years abroad, to the old family ranch in California. Coming from a tired, war-wracked Europe, she expects to find her own people full of strength and vigor; instead things are pretty much washed up, the blood of the old settlers has run thin, her favorite cousin, Elliott, is no longer a stalwart farmer, but a lazy, embittered failure who runs a gas station and hates the industrious Italians who are coming to own all the land.

But Carlotta refuses to surrender; she resolves instead to try to make a go of her broken-down ranch. The play might have got somewhere as a fully realistic study of Carlotta's attempted readjustment. Actually, it fobs her off with some vague and romantic attitudes, while devoting most of its last two acts to the plight of Elliott's young daughter, who is in love with one young man and with child by another. There are also several minor characters dragged in to provide some otiose comedy. Only the bitter, worn-out Elliott succeeds, until near the end, in being genuinely interesting and real.

He is real partly from being the best-drawn character in the play, partly from being the best-acted one. Mr. March's performance is strong, varied and convincing. Miss Eldridge's is by no means so good; she seems, for a woman of Carlotta's nature, too frail and even birdlike. Alan Reed plays too broadly as an Italian farmer, but Judy Parrish shows feeling as the harassed daughter, and Doro Merande is, as always, amusing in a bit part.